

Members in Particular

“Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.” **THERE IS A CLOSE AND INTIMATE** relationship that exists between those in Christ and our Heavenly Father. **—I Corinthians 12:27** This relationship which we feel toward him is what we should also feel toward one another. Our theme text presents a very positive statement from the Lord, and our response likewise should be very positive. Yet, it is not always so because we have an Adversary, Satan, the Devil, who is attempting in every way possible to destroy the faith of the child of God. He is bent on destroying the positiveness of our position, and our standing in the body of Christ.

Why is the Adversary interested in destroying our faith? Before we can know what steps we should take to defend ourselves against our great enemy we have to know what his motives are. We have to know why he is interested in us. We must realize that Satan has already been judged. He knows that he is ultimately to be destroyed if God's plan is carried out to completion. He understands that the

only hope he has of saving himself is to upset God's plan in some way, to frustrate it, and to somehow as a result, perhaps, avoid that sentence of death that has already been pronounced against him.

SATAN'S METHODS TO DESTROY THE BODY OF CHRIST

Satan tried to destroy Jesus at his First Advent. Then, down through the Gospel Age, he endeavored to destroy the church as it existed through that period by means of the great Antichrist system. Here, during the harvest of the Gospel Age, he is making a final desperate attempt to destroy the remaining members of the body of Christ on this side of the veil, i.e., the faith of the Lord's people. He is a very active and potent enemy.

The Adversary would have little success by coming to us openly and in such ways as to be easily detected, but he is a wily foe and never uses that approach. He comes to us in subtle ways that are very apt to deceive us if we are not careful. He makes his attacks primarily through the weaknesses of our flesh and sometimes through the power of suggestion. God permits this because it is a means of testing, proving, developing and crystalizing our faith structure.

When Satan approaches us in these very subtle ways, we may not always recognize that it is the voice of the Adversary tempting us. We here suggest a few examples of things he might 'whisper' in our ears. Notice in these that each one, regardless of how minor it may seem, might have an effect not only upon ourselves, but also upon the body of Christ—the ecclesia with which we are associated.

For example, we might, in our minds, say this, 'I'm too tired to go to meeting tonight. I've had a hard day. I'm tired and the Lord will understand.' Or, we might say, 'I've got so many weaknesses, I'll be satisfied with whatever the Lord gives me.' These are very subtle thoughts, and on the surface it appears there is nothing really wrong with them. Perhaps this thought might enter our minds—'That's just my way. The Lord will forgive.' Or, 'I won't comment in meeting because others can say it so much better.' Or, 'My judgment isn't always so good, so I won't participate in voting in class elections.'

Notice that each one of these in some way affects the whole body. They seem minor, unimportant in some respects. Yet these negative thoughts, although they represent only small beginnings, if they are persisted in, if that trend of thought is continued, could develop into an attitude which could not only ultimately stunt our Christian growth, but also be detrimental to the spiritual well-being of the entire ecclesia. Indeed, one of the purposes of this lesson is to center our thoughts on our association with the ecclesia.

RESISTING SATAN

How can we resist the Devil in the areas we have cited? We know if we can resist him, he will "flee" from us. (James 4:7) There is only one way to do this, and that is by maintaining a very positive and aggressive approach to the carrying out of our consecration vows and our responsibilities within the body of Christ.

Our text emphatically declares, 'Ye are the body of Christ.' That means now, on this side of the veil.

Not only this text in I Corinthians 12:27, but throughout the entire chapter, Apostle Paul talks about the relationship and the responsibility that each of us has in connection with our association in the body of Christ now. Nothing in Paul's words here has any reference to that which is beyond the veil. This is why it is such an important matter. Further, whether we are privileged to be counted as faithful and enter into the glories beyond the veil will depend on what we are doing about our responsibilities while we are right here—today—and throughout the remainder of our earthly walk in the narrow way.

MEMBERS IN PARTICULAR

Our theme text, however, goes further. It does not merely say that we are members of the body of Christ. It declares very emphatically that we are 'members in particular.' It has been said that when we come into the body of Christ we lose our identity; we are lumped into one basket, and God deals with us as a collective body. This is true from certain standpoints, but the apostle is here telling us about a very special identity that each of us must have, peculiarly ours, that develops over the course of our Christian life—an identity that develops on the basis of our relationship with our Heavenly Father and also with our brethren.

When gemstones are taken out of the miry pit, each one requires a little different preparation in order to be made beautiful by the lapidary. He treats each one of these little gems as he prepares them as though they were the most important one of all. He does not rate them, as though saying, 'I will make

this one more beautiful than that other one.’ The lapidary never does that. He develops each gemstone individually to the fullest beauty and reflection of light possible. So it is that our relationship to the Heavenly Father is a very personal one. He treats each one of his children as a most important jewel that he is developing and making beautiful. Each member of the body of Christ is very special to the Heavenly Father. Through his guardian angels he is overruling the affairs of each according to his special design and plan for them. He desires to have a very special relationship with every individual body member throughout the period of their Christian life. Other translations of the last part of our theme text are as follows: “Each is a separate and necessary part.” (*Taylor Translation*) “Members with assigned parts.” (*Berkley Translation*) We do not decide what part we will have in the body. It is God that sets the members, every one of them in the body, as it pleaseth him.—I Cor. 12:18

ALL MEMBERS OF THE BODY IMPORTANT

The apostle describes in I Corinthians, chapter 12, the diversity of administration that various members have in the body of Christ. He pictures it using the symbol of the human body. In verse 7 of this chapter we read, “The manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.” This means that God gives each one of his people the opportunity through the manifestation of his Holy Spirit in their lives to contribute something to the profit of all the ecclesia, of all the body. This leaves no one out. It means there is not a brother or sister in any ecclesia, in any location throughout the

world, those who are members of this body, who do not have a very important and particular responsibility that must be fulfilled on behalf of, and for the profit of, the body as a whole.

If we recognize this, in order to carry out this responsibility, we need to cultivate a very close and unique relationship with all of our brethren. Referring to Ephesians 4:15,16, Paul states, "Speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."

To apply this principal in a practical way, we may think of the ecclesia with which we associate as a miniature example of the body of Christ. Apostle Paul further describes the beautiful relationship that exists between each of us as parts in this body. "As the human body, which has many parts, is a unity, and those parts, despite their multiplicity, constitute one single body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by the Spirit into one body, whether we were Jews, Greeks, slaves or free men, and we have all had experience of the same Spirit. Now the body is not one member but many. If the foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand I don't belong to the body', does that alter the fact that the foot is a part of the body? Or if the ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye I don't belong to the body', does that mean that the ear really is not part of the body? After all, if the body were all one eye, for example, where would be the sense of hearing?

Or if it were all one ear, where would be the sense of smell? But God has arranged all the parts in the one body, according to his design. For if everything were concentrated in one part, how could there be a body at all? The fact is there are many parts, but only one body. So that the eye cannot say to the hand, 'I don't need you!' nor, again can the head say to the feet, 'I don't need you!' On the contrary, those parts of the body which have no obvious function are the more essential to health; and to those parts of the body which seem to us to be less deserving of notice we have to allow the highest honor of function. The parts which do not look beautiful have a deeper beauty in the work they do, while the parts which look beautiful may not be at all essential to life! But God has harmonized the whole body by giving importance of function to the parts which lack apparent importance, that the body should work together as a whole with all the members in sympathetic relationship with one another. So it happens that if one member suffers all the other members suffer with it, and if one member is honored all the members share a common joy."—I Cor. 12:12-26, *J. B. Phillips Translation*

These verses indicate how important it is that we maintain and earnestly strive to develop a very close, sympathetic and loving relationship with each one in the ecclesia, in the body of Christ. Each are 'members in particular.' We have not placed ourselves, nor has anyone else in the body of Christ, placed us where we are. It is our Heavenly Father only who has placed us in the body of Christ, and we must fulfill those very personal and special things that are required of us according to our ability and

our overruled circumstances. This is vital for the making of our calling and our election sure.

In the matter of the ecclesia relationship, it is especially important that the elders of the ecclesia realize the tremendous responsibility which is upon them of seeing that, so far as is reasonably possible, each member is made to feel that they are a contributing part, a necessary part, of the whole body of the ecclesia. Each should be encouraged to attend meetings. Each should be encouraged to take an active part in the studies, and participate in the activities of the ecclesia. All should be engaged wholeheartedly in these things. If this is done, the ecclesia will prosper spiritually by that which every joint supplieth.

LESSONS FROM ROMANS 12

Apostle Paul examines this subject further, and in a very personal way, in Romans, chapter 12. This chapter is one that we should become very familiar with and pay close attention to, as it bears upon our entire Christian life, from consecration until we finish our course in death. We would like to glean a few points from this chapter. In the first verse, we see consecration represented. Presenting our bodies a “living sacrifice” marks the very beginning of our Christian walk. The second verse suggests, on the basis of that consecration, there is something that must be accomplished, that being the transformation of our minds, the transformation of our words and actions, away from the flesh to the doing of the Heavenly Father’s will in our lives. In the third verse, the apostle suggests that before we can accomplish this—before this transformation can even begin—

we must humble ourselves. It is only on the basis of a sincere humility of heart and mind that this transformation could ever occur.

Beginning with the fourth verse, the apostle begins to develop a positive action program that, if carefully applied in the life of a Christian, will carry out the requirement of the second verse—this transformation. If we apply the program that the apostle outlines to the best of our ability in our lives, it will break down all the barriers of pride, self-esteem, selfishness, evil speaking, criticism of our brethren, negligence, slothfulness, disinterest in the well-being of our brethren and the ecclesia, discouragement, and fear. All of this can be done if we carry out and apply in our lives the simple instructions that the apostle has outlined in this chapter. Such application will accomplish the transforming work in our lives. No one else can do this, nor work these things out for us. We must become active participants in this work of faith, and it should be a matter of great concern to us that it be accomplished.

The Lord has placed us in our present circumstances because there is something very special, very unique, that he wants us to do, and which can best be done in the particular circumstances we now find ourselves in. If we are “fervent in spirit; serving the Lord” (Rom. 12:11), the windows of heaven will open and God will pour out a blessing so much that we cannot contain it all. (Mal. 3:10) We will begin to see opportunities to serve the Lord and the brethren that we never realized were there. If we truly apply ourselves to the words of the lessons here, our lives will become exciting, they will

become very busy in our close relationship which will develop between ourselves, our Heavenly Father, our Lord Jesus, and our fellow members of the body. We should not look, however, for big things, as is sometimes mistakenly thought. We do not have to do some great work in order to be noticed by the Lord. The ‘big thing’ we may contemplate might be motivated by pride, and a desire to be seen and recognized by our brethren.

We should also notice the words of Romans 12:16, “Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate.” Another translation puts it this way, “Do not aspire to eminence, but willingly adjust yourselves to humble situations.” (*Berkley Translation*) How plain that is. These humble situations are apparently where the Lord wants most of us to be. Here in these lowly places—our day-to-day environment, our common circumstances of life—the Lord is carefully preparing each of us through experience. He is chiseling, shaping, polishing, washing away the dross, the clay, carefully preparing each of us as precious gems that will ultimately be able to reflect his glory and his light throughout all of the ages to come. Psalm 139:15 states, “My substance was not hid from thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.”

MEMBERS ONE OF ANOTHER

In verses four and five of Romans 12, notice that each of us has been placed in the one body in a very special way, with gifts and responsibilities differing one from the other. Yet, the apostle says, we are “members one of another.” (vs. 5) It is impossible

to express a closer relationship than those sentiments, ‘members one of the other.’ The thought contained here is that each of us are part of the whole body, and also mutually dependent on the other parts of the same body.

We do not always appreciate this mutual dependency. Sometimes we seek the fellowship of those who are more active and outgoing in our ecclesias, neglecting others, those whom we may think are less mature. Perhaps the more timid ones sit in the back row and we do not hear from them very often; or there may be those who do not speak with command of the language, and we have difficulty communicating with them and take the easy way out by avoiding them most of the time. There could perhaps be other little inhibitions that we may have in respect to certain ones in the ecclesia. Some may have a weakness that is particularly distasteful to us. We may forget that our relationship is not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. Regardless of any of these things, let us make a point to have full communication with all of those of the ecclesia so far as possible—the body of Christ. Let them know that we care about them and love them. They will be greatly blessed and encouraged by our fellowship and concern, our interest, and ere long, we will discover how much we need them as well. The unity and love flowing between all will be of mutual benefit, because we are members one of another.

SERVING THE ECCLESIA

In the sixth and seventh verses of Romans 12, Paul identifies some as having the ability to effectively speak—the gift of prophecy. Those who have

that ability should use it to full advantage for the benefit of the ecclesia. "Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering." (vs. 7) Another translation says, "If your gift is that of serving others, serve them well." The thought seems to be that we are not to be choosy in our service—not just serving those whom we want to serve, but serving the whole body. Continuing in verse seven, "Or he that teacheth, on teaching." In a Bible study it is important that the elder leading it have the qualifications of being "apt to teach." This is a scriptural qualification (I Tim. 3:2), yet one of the best forms of teaching is to draw discussion from the congregation. This approach serves two purposes. First, it will encourage the brethren to private study in preparation for the meeting and, second, it will stimulate thought and concentration in the study that is in progress on the part of all present. We believe the Lord has greatly blessed this arrangement for the spiritual prosperity of the ecclesia.

Romans 12:8 says, "He that exhorteth, on exhortation." Looking once again at another translation, it reads, "If our gift be the stimulating of the faith of others let us set ourselves to it." Some have a special talent for encouraging others. Who is there among us that does not need encouragement from time to time? We need to encourage those who are in a more active role in the labors of the Bible Student movement. We want to look to those in our ecclesias who are performing services faithfully on behalf of the body of Christ, and encourage them. Let us extend this thought to every member of the ecclesia and feel a profound responsibility of encouraging each one of them.

A LIFELONG PROCESS

Throughout the remainder of Romans 12, we see many other admonitions the apostle addressed, all related to our Christian responsibility one toward the other, and especially as members of the one body. This washing away of the clay, the polishing, the chiseling, the shaping, is a lengthy process. It is this way because of the barriers of our fallen flesh, and because our Heavenly Father has ordained that it can only be accomplished through the full cooperation of a willing and humble heart in each one of us. God is determined that our free moral agency is not to be circumvented in this work. It is our responsibility, and he will allow us the option of going as slow as we want in this work to our spiritual detriment. He would be pleased, however, to see us take these steps quickly which would continue our development in this wonderful relationship of love that we must maintain between ourselves and the whole body of Christ.

We see the traces of clay, the fallen human nature that we all have in a measure. We see the little faults both in others and certainly in ourselves. Let us be all the more determined to help each other. Let us be determined that we are going to encourage each other to overcome these things through a very close fellowship and through the outpouring of love, sympathy, and forgiveness, where needed. Indeed we are all of the one body, and members in particular. All of the Lord's dear people are very special to the Heavenly Father, each and every one, and all should likewise become very special to each of the other members of the body of Christ. ■